



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



The Commission on Children at the Cutting Edge

February 2013

The Commission's Mandate

Public Act 85-584 created the nonpartisan Connecticut Commission on Children (COC) in 1985, mandating it to promote public policies in the best interests of children. To that end, the Commission: develops landmark policies; brings dollars and donated skills to the state; leads in media for children and youth; performs key research on children's needs; brings the family to government and government to the family; and regularly wins recognition as one of the best coordinating entities for children in the nation. This costs the state just \$0.64 per child.¹

A Smart Return on Investment

For each dollar invested in its budget, the Commission on Children brings in more than \$1.45 from federal, foundation, and private sources.² These funds do not come to the Commission; rather, they support initiatives at the state and local levels. Examples include:

Initiative	Approx. Dollars
2010-2013	
W.K. Kellogg Foundation—Connecticut portion of PLTI expansion as a research-based national model for parent engagement and family civics.	\$30,000
WorkPath Fund—a fund developed with philanthropy and workforce partners to raise dollars for parents who need specific and limited resources to keep a job or reach new employment such as funds for car repair, an employment test, work clothes, etc.	\$60,000
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving—Best urban practices for children and youth in Hartford focused on literacy, parent engagement, and reduction of childhood obesity low birth weight.	\$265,000
Grossman Family Foundation—Grant to address reading, using an alternative reading assessment tool, school mentors to train teachers and administrators in the science of teaching reading, trainings of parents on how to most effectively partner in their children's literacy, and the development of a civic canopy of community literacy opportunities.	\$880,000
Pew Foundation, Results First—Connecticut was selected to be a premier state for replication of the Results First return-on-investment prevention strategy in corrections and juvenile justice.	\$100,000
Zero to Three, Integration of Home Visitation—Connecticut was selected as seven among 23 applicants to work as part of a multi-state team at the national level on model home visitation integration with early care and education.	\$20,000
William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund—Work with parents, communities, civic leaders and state/local partners to increase parent leadership, promote pre-literacy/literacy activities for pre-school children, and propose social policy remedies to narrow the achievement gap and reduce the child poverty rate.	\$50,000

National League of Cities—Grant to create a resource of noteworthy town programs and policies for children and youth.	\$17,500
A sampler of funding secured in previous years	
Over the past eight years, helped to generate an estimated \$1 million in matching funds for parent leadership training in 23 towns and cities.	\$1 million
National Institute for Child Development funding from Congress to train school leaders and teachers in the science of reading.	\$3.3 million
Free technical assistance to create an out-of-school time system of programs for children. Disney and Mott Foundations.	\$3 million
Philanthropic dollars for prevention programs, including the Packard and Travelers foundations, Research!America, and The Rockefeller Brothers Fund.	\$200,000
Funding for anti-bullying programs in schools to make learning safe, namely \$500,000 from a private donor, which was matched by state dollars to create \$1 million for the Safe Learning Act.	\$1 million

“Business has partnered with the Commission on Children for more than 10 years. Linking the development of the child to competitiveness, quality of life and the overall strength of the economy, business leaders meet to discuss child policy issues. The business community, across small, international, corporate and moderate size businesses, has been most active in school readiness, safety and prevention policy for the youngest generation.”

—David E. A. Carson, retired CEO, People's Bank

Reaching the Public

- Established a “play station” at the John Reed Middle School in Newtown immediately following the December 2012 shootings at the nearby Sandy Hook Elementary School. This brought together elements of play, community mental health, family strengthening, and disaster management.
- Also following the Newtown shootings, quickly created a resource page on our website for parents and teachers who needed information on how to talk to children about the murders (www.cga.ct.gov/coc/newtown.htm). Among those who immediately posted links to the page: the state Department of Education, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, the National Conference of State Legislatures, individual state lawmakers, and news organizations.
- Designed an event where students across the state may offer tribute to Newtown, along with their ideas and concerns regarding school and community safety. This will take place in April 2013. All findings will be chronicled by the State Library for a point-in-time analysis, and a compendium of commentary will be designed.
- Created a curriculum for parents in targeted elementary schools to teach them how to partner with schools on the reading achievement gap.
- Designed the Parent Leadership Training Institute, which teaches parents to constructively lead for good child outcomes. This family civics initiative has over 2,500 graduates in Connecticut serving on local school readiness councils, youth advisories, school boards and other civic venues to improve child outcomes.
- Performed a return-on-investment analysis on programs for children and published the findings in a booklet called “A Children’s Stock Portfolio.”

- With University of Connecticut men's basketball coach Jim Calhoun serving as the spokesperson, engineered a media campaign to show parents, educators, and policymakers the savings that come from investing dollars in the prevention of problems that can cost children—and society—later on. The centerpieces were a television public service announcement and a publication, "Playbook for Prevention: The Winning Game Plan for Kids and Connecticut." This was funded through \$1 million in grants and in-kind support.
- Disseminated more than 2 million copies of Commission-created booklets for parents on preparing children for school, selecting quality child care, helping children read, and addressing children's health issues.
- Host public forums and television talk shows on key issues such as child obesity, homeland security and children, early literacy, fatherhood, gangs and youth violence, child poverty reduction, and prevention strategy.
- Bring experts to Connecticut including: 1) **Miss America**, who spoke in schools about her plan to address bullying; 2) **Libby Doggett**, director of home visitation for The Pew Foundation and expert on systems reform in both home visitation and early care; 3) **Patrick Ireland**, a student hero and survivor of the Columbine massacre in Colorado; 4) **Marian Wright Edelman**, civil rights leader and CEO of the Children's Defense Fund; 5) Scandinavia's **Dan Olweus**, credited with one of the most successful anti-bullying programs in the world; 6) **Morgan Spurlock**, director and star of the documentary film "Super Size Me," on child obesity; 7) **Dr. T Berry Brazelton**, famed child pediatrician on the early years and; 8) **Michael Petro** of the Fortune 500 Committee for Economic Development, on children and return on investment.

Track Record in Model Policy

The Commission has spearheaded policies, in collaboration with state policy leaders, that have put Connecticut in the forefront of children's policy in the United States:

- **An Act Concerning a System of Home Visitation** (2013) — Drafted language to create a comprehensive system of home visitation for vulnerable new families. CT has model programs but no system of coordination to be helpful to the family as consumer, to coordinate training, to integrate home visitation with early care and education, to assure quality control or to collect shared data.
- **Literacy Reforms in An Act Concerning Educational Reform** (P.A. 12-116) — This bill, designed with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, requires reforms to narrow the reading achievement gap including a) new reading assessment instruments, b) a professional development plan in reading based on scientifically-based reading research, c) provisions for individualized reading plans and interventions for every student, kindergarten through grade three, not reading at proficiency, d) improved training in early language acquisition for the early care field, and e) transition plans between early care and kindergarten for each child in language and vocabulary. (2012).
- **An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws** (P.A. 11-232) — Drafted the comprehensive law with state leaders that strengthened efforts to prevent school bullying. The law required—among other things—that schools implement a safe school climate plan, designate a safe school climate specialist, and included a streamlined anonymous reporting and accountability system, including for cyberbullying.
- **An Act Establishing A Youth Employment System** (2012) — Worked with the Connecticut Workforce Development Council to design Senate Bill 12-291 to make available tax credits for

employers that hire young adults and develop youth employment strategies that bolster youth employment. The bill was included in Public Act No. 12-1, An Act Implementing Provisions of the State Budget For The Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2012.

- **An Act Concerning Children Affected by Disaster and Terrorism** (P.A. 11-66) – Ensures all schools and licensed child care settings develop and test disaster response plans that address the needs of children. These plans must include evacuation plans, family reunification plans, and specific plans for children with special needs.
- **An Act Concerning Educational Reform** (P.A. 12-116) – Ensures elementary school children in our state participate in a minimum of 20 minutes of daily physical exercise. Also establishes a pilot for coordinated school health, bringing together all aspects of health and wellness. Both elements address the growing threat of childhood obesity in our state.
- **An Act Concerning Children In The Recession** (P.A. 10-133) — This act was the first of its kind in the nation, led by the Speaker of the House, to assure particular research and a policy focus on the 35,000 children who would fall into poverty, quickly and deeply, due to the recession. Focus on streamlining services, building efficiencies, and improvements in utilization of federal funds, to address the human and fiscal costs of recessions, including child hunger, family violence, school failure, youth runaways, homelessness, child abuse and neglect.
- **An Act Concerning Responsible Fatherhood and Strong Families** (P.A. 09-175) — Provides unemployed and under-employed dads with the training they need to support their children and form better connections with them. It gives judges the option to refer fathers to services instead of jail if they fall behind in their payments, due to unemployment.
- **The Children and Homeland Security Act** is the only state law in the nation addressing the needs of children in natural and unnatural disasters. (Special Act 02-8) A COC report was used nationally assessing the impact of terrorism and Hurricane Katrina on children.
- **The State Investment in Prevention Act** bolsters a prevention response rather than crisis and high cost. Set a goal for state agencies that serve children and families: allocation of at least 10 percent of their budgets to prevention services by 2020. (Public Act 06-179)
- **Eliminating lead poisoning in children.** In 2007, Public Act 07-2 required universal lead screening in pediatric wellness visits for all children at ages 12 and 24 months to ensure early detection and treatment. In 2008, landmark legislation in Connecticut (Public Act 08-106) preceded national law by setting standards for lead content in children's toys and products.
- **The Child Poverty Reduction Law.** The first bill of its kind in the nation, seeks to reduce poverty among children by 50 percent within the next decade. Benchmarks and accountability measures are included. (Public Act 04-238)
- **The Parent Trust Act,** a parent engagement initiative to maximize family input and participation in policy at the school, neighborhood, and state level. This Trust is being replicated in other states. It began in a partnership with our executive branch and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Now the Graustein Memorial Fund matches these state dollars to assure family civics opportunities in towns through a competitive grant process. (Public Act 01-2) *Note: The Parent Trust is proposed to be in the new Office of Early Childhood.*
- **The Safe Learning Act** ensured safe learning in school and the reduction of child aggression. (Public Act 01-1)

- **School Readiness** designed the school readiness plan for the Speaker of the House. This legislation developed preschool for 3 and 4-year-olds. This legislation also united DSS and SDE funding streams, created school readiness councils, and began the statewide infrastructure for quality early care and education. (Public Act 97-25)

"The Commission on Children is the brain trust for children's issues in Connecticut." -- Joseph McGee, Vice-President, Public Policy & Programs, The Business Council of Fairfield County



Targeted Policy Research

- Released a comprehensive infant-toddler policy study, *First Words, First Steps* to the Governor. Harvard University cites this as the most comprehensive infant toddler framework in the states.
- Studied the impact of literacy assessment tools in kindergarten through third grade to assist teachers, offer prompt data-driven interventions for early learners in reading and to narrow the achievement gap.
- Led the statewide study of what parents want in an early care and education system. Trained facilitators, raised funds, and ensured that parents, in both English and Spanish, were offered opportunity for input into the 2013 early care and education reform plan.
- Led the study on the impact of both 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina on the children and youth of Connecticut. This report went national and was utilized in New Orleans as well as by many national organizations.
- Established the first *Social State of Connecticut* with business, Yale, Vassar and Fordham Universities that reports to the General Assembly and public on quality of life and trend lines specific to families and youth.
- Coordinated the statewide kindergarten study on the implications of preschool on the achievement gap.
- Coordinated the study of teacher training in literacy within higher education regarding how children learn to read, how to assess and intervene to improve early language acquisition, vocabulary and school performance.
- Analyzed the impact of bullying in schools and neighborhoods.
- Compiled international and national research on the impact of race bias through early exposure to diversity among young children, in partnership with Yale University.
- Determined the impact of parent engagement on child outcomes and community.

Leadership Development and Capacity-Building

The Commission on Children has been honored by national and state recognition for cutting edge work. This includes the Good Housekeeping Award for Best Practices in Government, the Family Impact Seminars recognition of us as the best coordinator of children's issues within state governments, the national Casey Foundation Award of the Grade Level Reading Pacesetter Award for our work on model policy in reading.

The Commission helps the public participate in state government through:

- A partnership with the National Conference of State Legislatures. Our Executive Director is the past Staff Chair for NCSL on Human Services and has been appointed to serve on their national committees on hunger and on home visitation;
- An on-going partnership with mayors on children's issues. The Commission has a formal partnership with the Connecticut Conference on Municipalities on child and youth issues related to health, safety and learning;
- A nationally recognized Parent Leadership Training Institute in 23 cities and towns to help parents become advocates for their children and other children. Over the past decade, it is estimated that PLTI graduates, now numbering 2500, generated more than \$1.1 million in volunteer hours;
- A Business Advisory Committee comprised of executives from small and large businesses to look at competitiveness and child policy implications;
- A prevention advisory comprised of judges, mayors and child policy experts to review prevention and expand its potential for cost savings and proven outcomes;
- A model partnership with superintendents and parents, teaching both parent and school leaders how to partner to promote school excellence. Parents Supporting Educational Excellence Initiative is in nine Connecticut cities.

"Whatever the issue may be, the Commission seeks out the authoritative information, identifies the knowledgeable leaders in the field and defines the best practices. In doing so, the Commission informs the legislative process and the general public on those policies that have proven effective in advancing the health and well being of children. If we didn't have the Commission, we would have to invent it." -- **Peter Libassi, formerly of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare**



ⁱ Calculated by taking the Commission's annual budget of \$517,783 and dividing it by the U.S. Census Bureau 2011 estimate of CT population under 18 years old (22.4%, or 803,425 people under 18 years old).

ⁱⁱ Calculated by dividing the average sum of money raised through the Commission by its total budget over two years, which is \$517,783 in FY12; \$514,852 in FY11.